

## SECTION II.—THE REMAINS OF AK-SIPIL AND KIGHILLIK

March to  
Ak-sipil.

Resuming the march towards Ak-sipil in a north-easterly direction we reached the edge of the cultivated area within less than half a mile from the Tam-öghil excavations. A little beyond the hard loess ground was covered with fragments of ancient pottery showing much effect of erosion, and similar débris was found in patches, at short intervals, for another five miles. As the ground was everywhere greatly eroded, it is impossible to say whether these remains belong to villages existing at the same time or to settlements established at different points during successive periods. Further on we encountered large dunes, which soon grew remarkably steep and high, up to 60 ft. and perhaps more, the heavy coarse sand unmistakably indicating its origin from the silt deposits of the river. The uniform direction of individual dunes, from north-north-west to south-south-east, was here clearly marked, while the general bearing of the sandy range to which they belonged was, as shown in the large-scale inset-map of the Khotan oasis, slightly different. The depression between the large dunes disclosed patches of light sandy soil covered with scrub and Kumush, a plain indication of the nearness of subsoil water, which the shepherds of the Jiya tract who graze their flocks here were said to reach by digging wells only 4 to 5 ft. deep.

Traces of  
ancient  
irrigation.

After crossing this succession of dunes for close on four miles, the remains of Ak-sipil came in sight on ground clear of high sand, and showing in places marks of erosion. As we approached the ruined walls which have given the site its name I thought I could distinguish traces of little embankments dividing ancient fields, and of distributing 'Ariks' along them. Close inspection of the patches of open ground in the immediate vicinity of the ruined walls confirmed this impression, and made me inclined to believe that the talk of Turdi and other guides I had brought from Yurung-kāsh as to the existence of an ancient 'Üstang', visible for some distance along the track usually followed from Hanguya to Ak-sipil, might have foundation in fact.

The remains of Ak-sipil had been visited in 1891 and 1892 by MM. Dutreuil de Rhins and Grenard, and the account published from the notes of the former<sup>1</sup> proved to be as accurate in topographical details and general description as might be expected from so painstaking a traveller. The same can scarcely be said of the data which have been reproduced from the narrative of Mr. Högberg, a Swedish missionary at Kāshgar, who paid a rapid visit to the site in 1897, apparently to look for one of Islām Ākhūn's alleged find-spots of 'ancient books'<sup>2</sup>. An exact archaeological survey of the ruined site still remained to be effected, and to this I devoted one of the two days (April 8-9) during which I camped at Ak-sipil.

Remains of  
Ak-sipil  
fort.

The most conspicuous remains are ruined portions of the rampart and parapet of an ancient fort. They rise, among low dunes, 8 to 15 ft. above the original ground-level, and could be recognized at first sight as having belonged to a circumvallation either annular or oval. Fig. 57 shows the best-preserved part of them as seen from the outside, while from Fig. 58 some idea may be formed as to the appearance of almost the whole of them when viewed from some distance inside. Owing to the inadequate cover of sand, by far the greatest part of this circumvallation has completely disappeared through erosion, which has advanced particularly far in the southern portion of the area once covered by the fort. The exact survey made by me,

<sup>1</sup> See *Mission D. de Rhins*, iii. pp. 140 sq.

<sup>2</sup> See Hoernle, *Report of C.-A. ant.*, i. pp. xiv. sq., with

some diagrams to be referred to in notes below.